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THE FOUNDERS OF THE S.P.R.¹

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The longer you can look back the longer you can look forward.

—Sir Winston Churchill

ON an unknown date but probably in the closing weeks of 1881 the Dublin physicist William Barrett, visiting London, made his way one day to a house in Finchley. The house, called Rose Villa, stood (and perhaps still stands) in Hendon Lane. It was the residence of Edmund Dawson Rogers, a well-known and serious minded journalist and Spiritualist. Barrett made his journey to Rose Villa at Dawson Rogers's invitation, and he stayed the night. During a discussion of psychical matters Rogers 'suggested that a society should be started on lines which would be likely to attract some of the best minds which had hitherto held aloof from the pursuit of the inquiry.' The father of the Society for Psychical Research was Edmund Dawson Rogers and no other (15, 21). He was also the chief founder of the Society and the results of his plan are now historic.

Years later Barrett tried to convince himself that it was really he who first conceived the idea of creating the S.P.R., and that he was the chief founder of the Society. He said so in print (2). Dawson Rogers, a man of old world courtesy and modesty but a stickler for historical accuracy—as his editorship of *Light* bears witness—put the facts correctly (14). Barrett had asserted that it was he who gave the 'initial impulse' to the formation of the S.P.R. Over many years Barrett would occasionally drop a remark implying

¹ This paper is in large part a review of Alan Gauld's stimulating book *The Founders of Psychical Research*, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1968, 387 pp. £2.50p; Schocken Books, New York, \$10), and in part some reflections on the history of psychical research. One or two items contained not in the book have been added. This review was invited not by Dr Gauld (then editor of *Proceedings* and *Journal*) but by a former President of the Society the late Professor C. D. Broad, to whom he delegated his authority.

that he was the originator of the Society. Eventually, however, after Rogers's death he did candidly say that he could 'never forget the original impulse [Dawson Rogers] gave to the foundation of the Society for Psychical Research' (15).

It is regrettable to have to agree with Dr Gauld (who does not deal with the above matters) that Barrett was a 'vain and querulous' man. Rogers died at the age of 87 in 1910. Seven years later, Barrett in one of his books (1) reduced Rogers (and Myers) to one who 'co-operated' in the Society's foundation in 1882; and on a later page he implied that he himself had published the whole idea in 1881. He professed to recall

a series of articles I wrote for [*Light*] in 1881, entitled '*Pièces Justificatives*', for the formation of a Society for Psychical Research.

Barrett published no such articles in *Light* in 1881. It was not until 1883 that he published some articles entitled '*Pièces Justificatives* of the Need of a Society for Psychical Research'.

So far as I can determine, Rogers and Barrett shared only one thing in common—they were both Spiritualists. Temperamentally they differed in this, that whilst Rogers had little taste for self-advertisement, Barrett possessed it in a highly developed form. And so the myth that Barrett conceived and was the chief founder of the Society came to be accepted. Even so careful a writer as Mrs Sidgwick (18) in her obituary of Barrett, who died in 1925, stated that 'He was, . . . very definitely a founder of the Society—one may say *the* founder, for I believe the first idea of founding a Society at all was his.' But on Mrs Sidgwick's definition Dawson Rogers was '*the* founder' of the Society.

As will be mentioned below, the S.P.R. was not the first Society of the kind. There had been others. They died. If a Society of the type envisaged by Dawson Rogers was to survive beyond the teething stage, two types of adherents would have to be recruited: 1. Men of letters and scientists, who would unavoidably be in a minority; 2. Spiritualists in considerable numbers to ensure a substantial membership and some financial strength. The leading, and most responsible Spiritualist organisation of the time was a middle-class London society called the British National Association of Spiritualists, of which Dawson Rogers was a leading figure. The membership also included some scientists and members of the learned professions. The most celebrated and influential member was the Rev. Stainton Moses. To Rogers it must have been apparent that if he could obtain the adhesion of Moses, other Spiritualists would follow his lead. Moses rebuffed him; and it was evidently only Rogers's persuasive skill that eventually

induced his friend to accord the project his consent. It was apparently later that Moses again expressed his approval.

Barrett brought the proposal to Frederic Myers, and perhaps to Edmund Gurney, but, as Dr Gauld says, 'Myers and Gurney were not hopeful about the prospects of such a Society, and made their support conditional upon Sidgwick's accepting the Presidency.' Though pessimistic about the prospects, Sidgwick consented.

In the interests of historical accuracy it is necessary to consider here a statement, sometimes made, that the S.P.R. was 'founded by a group of scholars and scientists.' Indeed those very words are used in the Society's current Objects and Activities leaflet. Spiritualists, who played so important a role in the Society's creation, are not mentioned at all. Nothing could be more unfair or inaccurate.

Let us take the 'scholars and scientists' story seriously . . . for a moment . . . and observe what they are supposed to have done:

1. For their preliminary meetings the 'scholars and scientists' chose a *Spiritualists' Meeting House* in Great Russell Street.
2. They elected a Council of whom 68% were *Spiritualists*.
3. The Council elected a *Spiritualist* as Hon. Secretary (E. T. Bennett) and a *Spiritualist* as Hon. Treasurer (M. Theobald).
4. The Council elected a Vice-Presidency of whom 50% were *Spiritualists*.
5. They appointed six research committees and the Hon. Secretaries of four of them were *Spiritualists*.

Inspect the list of Original Members in the first part of *Proceedings* (October 1882). They number 102. A few uncommitted 'scholars and scientists' will be noted but there was a far greater number of identifiable Spiritualists from Bennett and Boole through the alphabet to Wedgwood, Weldon, Wyld and Wyndham. The description 'Spiritualists' and 'scholars and scientists' are not mutually exclusive, and men like Hensleigh Wedgwood and Walter Weldon were scholars or scientists too. But the strange thing is that in recent times almost all writers have attributed the Society's founding to uncommitted scholars and scientists and have ignored the all-important part played by the Spiritualists. This is turning historical truth upside down and inside out.

How did the myth about 'scholars and scientists' as the sole founders of the Society arise? Its source will be found, I believe, in a confusion between two quite different historical facts:

First, at the S.P.R.'s foundation and for several years afterwards, *control* of the Society lay in the hands of the Spiritualists. See the lefthand column in the table below. But—

Second, from the outset the hard work of research was done

almost entirely by *non-Spiritualists*. I refer particularly to Gurney, Podmore, Myers and others under the leadership of Sidgwick.

The sequel was hardly surprising. Those who did the work called the tune. Control of the Society passed slowly but surely from the Spiritualists to the non-Spiritualists. By 1887, quite a number of disappointed Spiritualist Founders of the Society had resigned from the Council. The 68% majority of Spiritualists in 1882 had now sunk to a minority of about 25%.

The ironical result is that whilst we justly remember a few men like Gurney and Myers, the myth of history has forgotten the much greater number of Spiritualists without whom it is difficult to believe that the S.P.R. would have got going at all.

Rogers paid for the printed circulars calling the preliminary meeting, for which he also procured the use of the B.N.A.S. rooms at 38 Great Russell Street. He also employed a shorthand writer to record the proceedings, but the transcribed notes seem long since to have disappeared. The first meeting, which was probably presided over by Barrett, was held on January 5, 1882. Further meetings took place and it was on the formal motion of Stainton Moses that the S.P.R. was founded. Who invented the title *The Society for Psychical Research* is not known.

The Society was formally constituted on February 20, 1882 with Henry Sidgwick as President and Edward T. Bennett as Honorary Secretary. A Council of nineteen (including the President) was predominantly Spiritualist:

SPIRITUALISTS

W. F. Barrett, physicist
E. T. Bennett, hotel keeper
Mrs George Boole, author
Alexander Calder, business man
Walter H. Coffin, scientist
D. G. FitzGerald, telegraphy expert
C. C. Massey, barrister
Rev. W. Stainton Moses, schoolmaster
F. W. Percival, scholar
E. Dawson Rogers, journalist
Morrell Theobald, accountant
Hensleigh Wedgwood, philologist
George Wyld, physician

NON-SPIRITUALISTS

Walter R. Browne, civil engineer
Edmund Gurney, scholar
F. W. H. Myers, scholar and poet
Frank Podmore, civil servant
J. Lockhart Robertson, alienist
Henry Sidgwick, philosopher

Mrs George Boole, widow of the great mathematician, did not long remain on the Council, whose minutes for September 27, 1882 contain this entry: 'Finding that she remains the only lady on the Council, Mrs Boole has expressed a wish to resign. Under the circumstances the Council concludes to accept her resignation

with regret.' No other woman was appointed to the Council for close on twenty years—Mrs Sidgwick in 1901. F. W. Percival was a barrister and, like Myers, an examiner in the Education Department. Wedgwood was one of the fathers of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Massey and Wyld were theosophists, but both broke loose from Madame Blavatsky. Little seems to be known of Walter Coffin, but since he was a Fellow of the Chemical and Linnean Societies I have denoted him 'scientist'. Of the non-Spiritualists, four—Browne, Gurney, Myers and Sidgwick—were Fellows or former Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge. Walter Raleigh Browne died of typhoid in 1884, at the age of 42. Podmore had had a strong disposition towards Spiritualism, but was already moving far away from it. Not all the researchers were members of the first Council. Podmore's friend Edward Reynolds Pease (who later became a Councillor) investigated haunted houses, physical mediums, and dowsing, and took charge of the Society's collection of ghost cases. Unfortunately, he dropped out soon after helping to create the Fabian Society, an organisation of which Podmore was also a founder—indeed Podmore is credited with inventing the name 'Fabian Society'. Mrs Sidgwick did not join the S.P.R. until 1884, but was probably involved in its labours behind the scenes from the outset.

Gauld writes of six Trinity men, Sidgwick, Myers, Gurney, the two Balfours and Walter Leaf who, he states, became the S.P.R.'s 'principal organisers, its very engine room'. The metaphor applies beautifully to the first three but hardly to the Balfours, and only doubtfully to Leaf. Arthur Balfour was President in 1893, but quite literally he never occupied the Presidential chair, for he never attended a Council meeting. Gerald Balfour was appointed to the Council in March, 1890. In the course of fifteen years he never showed up at any Council meeting. Thereupon, the Council elected him President of the Society. His important work on mediumship lay in the future. Leaf's valuable activities did not open until the late '80s when he began to produce his important contributions to the Piper story and the Blavatsky affair. His many reviews of foreign language books remind one of the very high standards of scholarship achieved by the Society's *Proceedings* and *Journal*.

I am convinced that one of the secrets of the Society's early success was that all the effective workers were young or nearly young. The oldest at the time of the Society's foundation was Sidgwick, aged 43. The ages of the others were: Barrett 38, Gurney 34, Hodgson 26, Myers 39, Pease 24, Podmore 26, Mrs Sidgwick 36; and Oliver Lodge who joined the Society in

1884 was then 32. It will be seen that the average age was 33. Youth was indeed at the prow and the wisdom of Sidgwick at the helm. They had zest, imagination and drive. Never again in the Society's history have so many young people been in the forefront of leadership. As it appears to me, that is the first lesson we learn from Gauld's book. He does not draw attention to the ages of those people, but he stands amazed—and rightly so—at their extraordinary output of research and of thousands of pages of papers of a very high order for the most part.

The foregoing is based only in part on Gauld's book, and may serve as an introduction to a discussion of the book's contents and of the lessons we may learn from a study of them. *The Founders of Psychical Research* falls into two parts: I. The Origins and Founders of Psychical Research; II. The Work of the Early Psychical Researchers. There are also an Epilogue dealing mainly with the Survival question, and three Appendices one of which furnishes useful summaries of experimental telepathy reports published by the Society in its first two decades. The amount of research that has gone into the preparation of the book is immense. Gauld has not only mastered twenty or thirty volumes of *Proceedings* and *Journal* and searched the Society's archives, he has studied the contents of long-forgotten Victorian memoirs and extended his inquiries to collections of letters and documents which he has unearthed in British and American libraries. As a piece of careful historical research on the early life of the Society, *The Founders* is without a rival (even though one recalls with respect the short accounts of E. T. Bennett and W. H. Salter).

Strictly, this is not a history of the Society but of *persons*—of their backgrounds; their developing thoughts and outlook; their intense activities over a period of twenty years; their successes and their failures. After an opening chapter on 'The Rise of Modern Spiritualism in America' Gauld passes to what he describes as 'The Genesis of Reluctant Doubt'. By this he means the decline of religious belief, a loss which he ascribes to the new intellectual climate represented by the writings of the younger Mill, the Comtists, Darwinism and other influences, all pointing to a purely materialistic view of human life. The impact of these new ideas on intelligent young men brought up in religious households was sometimes shattering; and in this regard it is surely not without significance that so many of the S.P.R.'s early leaders were the sons of clergymen: Barrett, Gurney, Myers, Podmore and Sidgwick. In 1862 Sidgwick confessed, 'I am only a Theist'. In 1880 he wrote, 'I sometimes say to myself that I believe in God; while sometimes again I can say no more than "I hope this belief is

true, and I must and will act as if it was.''' Myers felt his Christian belief badly shaken. Was death the end? As Gauld says, 'The prospect of annihilation seemed to rob his life of all its point and purpose.' Fortunately, his grandchildren by granting Gauld access to the Myers papers have done their ancestor a service. Though in recent years there has been a tendency in some uninformed quarters to depreciate Myers, now on reading *The Founders* one develops a sympathy and renewed admiration for him. The extracts from the Myers papers are too few to permit firm conclusions to be drawn, yet one cannot avoid the suspicion that the seeds of his future troubles at Cambridge (recounted by Gauld) were unwittingly planted by the love of a too-doting mother for her brilliant child.

As for other leaders, it is not clear to me that they were as much distressed by religious doubts as Sidgwick and Myers, if at all. Mrs Sidgwick (also brother Arthur) seems to have been a communicant in *both* the Church of Scotland and the Church of England all her adult life. Barrett adopted Spiritualism but remained faithful to Christian doctrine all his life. Gurney, as has recently been remarked to me, 'felt the world *without* survival hopelessly meaningless and largely positively evil.' Myers, on the other hand, pointed out that Gurney 'had not a strong personal craving for a future life', nor did he feel any great confidence in 'Providence'. Frank Podmore did not practise church-going in his adult life. Richard Hodgson abandoned the church in his youth.

Throughout *The Founders* Gauld gives us fascinating glimpses of the S.P.R. people in the midst of their investigations and discussions. On Hodgson, Gauld, after studying his life and some of his letters, finds it 'hard to understand how his fellow workers found him even tolerable, let alone why they liked and admired him'. Certainly Hodgson did talk and write with considerable feeling and outspokenness, even decorating his conversation with slang. He was eccentric in other ways. The Victorians, however—perhaps because they felt more secure than we do—were a tolerant people. If unconventional men like Hodgson also had qualities of mind and heart they were welcomed in Victorian company. Podmore wrote of Hodgson's 'genius for friendship', and William James epitomised him in one phrase, 'the incomparable and unconquerable Richard.'

Hodgson made greater personal sacrifices for psychical research than any other S.P.R. worker. It is hard to conceive how he survived the blows of fate that descended upon him. Abandoning law in Australia he hoped by winning a First Class in the Moral Science Tripos at Cambridge to enter on an academic career as a

philosopher. His hopes were ruined as a result of the Tripos examinations of 1881 in which neither he nor any other candidate was awarded a First Class. The story of that depressing affair will be found in his friend Hackett's book (7). He turned to psychical research, and taking up the post of Secretary to the wilting American S.P.R. in Boston he found that a certain medium 'Mrs P.', briefly mentioned in two trivial reports, had been all but abandoned by the Society's investigators. Hodgson rescued Mrs Piper from oblivion, thereby changing the course of psychical research history on two continents. Later, his meeting with a fellow-philosopher Professor James Hyslop in New York had effects that continue to this hour. Hodgson took Hyslop—then unknown in psychical research—in hand and trained him in the methods of psychical investigation. The result was that Hyslop became and remains to this day the ablest American psychical researcher in history. Hodgson's life was a series of professional triumphs and personal disappointments. A lady with whom he had fallen in love was willing to marry him, provided he would give up psychical research. But Hodgson had once written to Sidgwick (17), 'Psychical Research is the most important thing in the world; my life's success and failure shall be bound up with it.' So Hodgson lived alone for the rest of his life in his two rooms on Beacon Hill.

The sacrifices continued. His nominal salary was £300. Purely nominal, unfortunately. He was always poor and sometimes at the brink of destitution, from which Sidgwick and Myers would rescue him. Surviving those friends by a few years, he fell dead in December 1905 at the age of 50.

Edmund Gurney, to whom Gauld devotes considerable space, deserves a book to himself. His research papers are today as alive and useful for the study of paranormal phenomena as they were in the 1880s. His hypnotic investigations alone influenced the progress of that subject for twenty years (11). The processes of his mind were both analytic (and therefore critical) and synthetic (and hence creative). His experiments on the stages of hypnotic memory were unique, not only for the discoveries he made but for the methods he devised—such as planchette writing—which have a close bearing on the automatic speech and writing of mental mediumship.

His most famous work was *Phantasms of the Living*, the first classic of modern psychical research. That book ushered in the Golden Age of psychical research, an era that continued until the decline set in *via* ectoplasm and card guessing.

In the six and a half years following the Society's birth Gurney's

writings, either by himself or in collaboration, approached a million words in length. Then in June 1888 he died. As Gauld truly says, 'His death at the early age of forty-one was perhaps the greatest single blow that psychical research has ever suffered.' Like Henry Sidgwick—and many other people—Gurney suffered from periods of depression and insomnia. Unlike Sidgwick he also suffered from neuralgia, and he took drugs to alleviate pain and induce sleep. So, as ill-luck would have it, he died from an overdose of chloroform, which the coroner's jury decided was accidentally administered. Gauld offers no opinion on the matter. During the last five years I have been obliged to devote a great deal of time to Gurney's life story, and also to the rather awful history of chloroform accidents in the 19th century (even in the operating theatre). As a result of these inquiries I have been obliged to conclude that it would be an act of unreason to doubt the propriety of the jury's verdict.

It is important to remember also, that, among psychical researchers, Gurney's accident was not unique, except in its finality. For Cromwell Varley, F.R.S. almost died in similar circumstances. He, too, used chloroform to relieve pain, applying the sponge to his face when alone in bed. Usually, it seems, the sponge fell away when he lost consciousness. This time it remained on his face. He afterwards recalled (13), 'After a little time I became conscious . . . and I saw myself on my back with the sponge to my mouth, but was utterly powerless to cause my body to move.' His wife, feeling something was amiss, hurried to the bedroom 'and immediately removed the sponge, and was greatly alarmed'.

The number of persons who in nearly ninety years have been members of the S.P.R. is somewhere between eight and ten thousand. Of all that small army one man stands out as exceeding all others in importance. Henry Sidgwick. The reasons for his supreme significance to our Society can be briefly stated as follows. In the decade preceding the S.P.R.'s birth there had been numerous other societies, in London and elsewhere, created for the same purpose as this Society, namely to bring Spiritualists and non-Spiritualists together for the objective study of paranormal phenomena, and with no personal commitment. Those organisations were usually called Psychological Societies, correctly so because their avowed business was to study 'the science of the soul'. Nowadays, to many thousands of conventional psychologists, s**l and even m*nd are four-letter words unmentionable in polite psychological company, but it was not so a hundred years ago. Some of those Psychological Societies were not entirely

lacking in some intellectual quality, and I believe it was a future member of the S.P.R., Robert Louis Stevenson, who was Secretary of the Edinburgh Psychological Society. The most notable of these associations was the Psychological Society of Great Britain organised in 1875 by Serjeant E. W. Cox with the support of Myers, Stainton Moses and Coffin (who in 1882 became members of the S.P.R. Council). For some years it led an unproductive existence, the leadership being ineffective. Cox died on November 24, 1879, and five weeks and two days later the Society followed him into the Great Beyond.

Young societies in any field must have strong, imaginative leadership. Sidgwick provided that leadership for the S.P.R. as no one else could have done; and to Gurney and Myers, who insisted on Sidgwick as President, we owe an unredeemable debt.

Gauld tells us a great deal about Sidgwick that has not hitherto been published, providing some of the most absorbing passages in this illuminating book. Here are glimpses of his undergraduate days, his membership of The Apostles, his friendships, his deficiencies as a lecturer, his wit. Though he looked at problems presented to him from all angles he often had great difficulty in forming a firm opinion—perhaps too much an on-the-one-hand-and-on-the-other-hand sort of man. But he listened ‘with attention and even humility to any viewpoint, however gauche or stumbling, which was honestly propounded.’

Sidgwick was far from outstanding as an investigator—some of his spontaneous case reports are not examples for us to follow. But as a leader he possessed the invaluable gift of being able to pick the right men for the right jobs—Gurney for phantasms of the living, Hodgson for the Theosophical inquiry, Barrett for dowsing, and his own wife for the Census of Hallucinations. Mrs Sidgwick resembled her husband in some respects, but being an abler observer and more sensitive to small empirical details—often the crux of psychical investigations—she was a more skilled researcher. She was also endowed with exceptional capacity for mastering and ordering immense quantities of material, and with the use of her curiously small vocabulary presenting the product—in anything up to 650 pages—in such clear sentences that no one could fail to understand.

Immediately upon its appointment the Society's Council established six committees for the investigation of thought-reading, mesmerism, Reichenbach phenomena, haunted houses, spontaneous experiences and physical mediumship. All produced significant reports except the Physical Phenomena Committee, whose activities ended in disputes among its members.

Of the more promising side of the S.P.R. work Gauld writes with refreshing candour, describing in detail some reports of high quality but also pointing to some less satisfactory aspects of certain investigations. It appears to me—after studying Gauld's critical accounts—that, if we are to comprehend how those flaws came about it is necessary to keep two points constantly in mind: 1. The founders of the S.P.R. were *learners*; 2. They had a *double standard* of evidence.

1. Before the S.P.R. was born Sidgwick and most of his associates had already experienced a wide range of physical phenomena; but their knowledge of mental mediumship, spontaneous cases, haunts and most other phenomena was slight or non-existent. In those things the investigators had to 'learn the trade'. They taught themselves, one supposes, by private discussions but also by the hard road of trial and error. Reading through early reports it is illuminating to see how an error committed in one piece of research is carefully avoided in the next.

2. The Society's double standard of evidence arose in the following way. The Society's leaders were members of the middle and upper middle strata of society. When faced with the problem of estimating the value of evidence, they divided the world into two classes: (a) Members of their own class (Ladies and Gentlemen in the Victorian sense) whom they tended to treat trustingly; (b) Members of the lower classes, whom for brevity we may call the Peasants: them they treated with suspicion. This division of the British nation into 'goodies' and 'baddies' was never acknowledged in print but it was plainly carried out in practice. I do not think that snobbery had anything to do with it; rather this was the era—or nearly so—of Disraeli's 'Two Nations' in which one Nation did not know how the other one lived, thought or behaved. And what the S.P.R. people did not understand, they feared. I shall try to show below that this was one of the greatest pieces of good fortune that ever befell the S.P.R. For the moment let us look at some examples of how the two groups were so contrastingly treated.

The Peasants. Mrs Leonore Piper was the wife of a Boston shop assistant. Hodgson engaged detectives to spy upon her and her husband. When she came to England Oliver Lodge (10) 'overhauled the whole of her luggage' and inspected her mail. Thirty years later another professional medium, Mrs Leonard, 'also received the attentions of private detectives (16). When young G. A.' Smith, son of a boarding house keeper, collaborated as hypnotist and agent in telepathy experiments he was watched like a hawk (he survived all observations). The young Liverpool

shopgirls, believed to have telepathic abilities, were subjected by Guthrie, Lodge, Gurney and others to surveillance. When the sister of a coalminer in Newcastle-on-Tyne reported an apparitional experience the case was investigated and depositions taken by Miss E. E. Atkinson. But after that Gurney sent Hodgson to make independent inquiries. Finally, Gurney (perhaps still doubtful about a coalminer's sister) himself travelled to Newcastle to investigate anew. Satisfied at last, he published the case in *Phantasms of the Living* (6). When the Italian peasant Palladino gave séances at Cambridge she was held hand and foot (so far as the sitters could manage this feat). Those examples of stringent treatment meted out to this class of mediums and witnesses could be considerably extended.

Ladies and Gentlemen. When the Countess of Radnor's friends the Misses Wingfield did telepathy experiments with numbers, no one apparently was there to watch them, but their unsupported claims were published. An English vicar the Rev P. H. Newnham reported, almost entirely on his own authority, the evidence said to have been obtained through his wife's automatic writing. Myers approvingly printed the vicar's story. Mrs Margaret Verrall though she had many admirable qualities, was a poor observer. But in some card guessing experiments in which she was agent and her small daughter percipient there was no one present to watch, as G. A. Smith was watched. When Mrs Verrall later developed a very interesting automatic writing gift, no one offered to read her private mail or search her house (cf. Mrs Piper's 'luggage' above) and there is no record of private detectives haunting Selwyn Gardens or trailing Arthur Verrall through the streets of Cambridge and round the courts of Trinity. When Judge Sir Edmund Hornby reported having seen and talked with the apparition of a man on the night of the man's death the case was printed very largely as an act of faith in Sir Edmund's testimony (though ostensibly confirmed by his wife). Gauld recalls the strange telekinetic incidents occurring in the family of a young Army officer, H. W. Gore Graham. The alleged events had ceased before the S.P.R. heard of them, but Myers published the story without apparently interviewing the witnesses. Finally (though the list could be extended) after the turn of the century Gilbert Murray, being the percipient in telepathy experiments, was supposed to go to another room while the agent and friends decided on a 'target'. But no one accompanied and remained with him. It was *assumed* that he could not or would not if he could have obtained information by normal means. Whatever opinion we adopt of those experiments, criticism of Murray is surely un-

warranted—he merits our sympathy for being the victim of lax experimentation.

The historic paradox that emerges from the inconsistent treatment accorded to the two classes of people is this. The evidence provided by the 'ordinary' people is in large part accepted to this day; the evidence provided by the 'ladies and gentlemen' has in many cases passed into limbo.

But a word of caution may not be out of place. We are entitled to smile at the credulity of the S.P.R. leaders in their gracious treatment of their social equals, but only on one condition—that we are credulous enough to believe that, eighty years ago, we would have done otherwise.

The principal investigations published by the Society in its first twenty years concerned: 1. Phantasms of the Living; 2. William Eglinton, the slate writer; 3. the Davey-Hodgson study of mal-observation; 4. Mme Blavatsky; 5. Eusapia Palladino's telekinetic mediumship; 6. Mrs Piper's trance mental mediumship. Others, such as Gurney's historic experiments on the stages of hypnotic trance and on telepathic hypnotism, are only lightly touched on by Gauld—doubtless for lack of space.

Phantasms of the Living is 1400 pages long. Gauld summarizes the main facts in fifteen pages, conveying a very fair idea of this epoch-making work. The book grew out of the immense labours of the Literary Committee. In August 1883 the Committee held a series of meetings at Sidgwick's house in Cambridge when it was resolved to entrust the composition of the book to Gurney, Myers and Podmore. But, as Gauld has now discovered from an entry in Sidgwick's Journal, Sidgwick having had second thoughts attended a meeting in January 1885, apparently at C. C. Massey's flat in Victoria Street, at which he succeeded after an 'agitating discussion', in placing the sole authority for the work in the hands of Gurney. Sidgwick confided to his Journal that Gurney's 'superior trustworthiness . . . in scientific reasoning [was] more important than his literary inferiority. I could see that M. [Myers] was annoyed; but he bore it admirably. Ultimately we compromised thus. M. to write a long introduction and G. the body of the book'.

The number of cases admitted to the book was 701 (not '702'; the serial number '209' was accidentally not used). Of these, 22 were semi-experimental. In the main section of the book Gurney placed 352 spontaneous (or 'phantasmal') experiences which he regarded as of *high* evidential quality. The remaining 327 cases being of admittedly *inferior* evidential value were relegated to a Supplement.

The investigation of the cases was an enormous undertaking.

Gurney himself travelled far and wide through England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland interviewing percipients and witnesses, and once wrote to William James about his 'hundreds of personal interviews'. It may be of interest that at one time I went through the two volumes to ascertain who the other investigators were and how much work they did. It turned out that in many cases the interviewer's name was not given. I surmise that in most such instances the interviewer was Gurney—who might disregard his own name but hardly those of his valued collaborators. The number of cases in which the investigator can certainly be identified was 185 (this and the following figures were not double-checked, but are likely to be fairly accurate). This number breaks down among the individual interviewers thus: Gurney 105 cases, Podmore 30, Sidgwick 14, Myers 5, Mrs Sidgwick, Hodgson, Wedgwood, Rev. J. A. Macdonald and Miss Porter 3 each, 16 other investigators 1 each. Clearly Podmore was Gurney's chief assistant, and Myers's part was apparently smaller than one would have expected, but he may have taken a larger part in the writing of thousands of letters.

Gauld, assessing the book's worth, says that 'To pass from even the ablest of previous works to *Phantasms of the Living* is like passing from a mediaeval bestiary or herbal to Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae*.' He also describes the 'central thesis' of the book as 'crisis apparitions'. In some instances these apparitions were those of the assumed agent and were seen by the percipient within twelve hours of the agent's (unexpected) death. But Gurney realised that if many people see apparitions, some will coincide by mere temporal chance alone with the appearer's death. Gurney needed to know how many people in Britain had seen apparitions of their friends whether they coincided with death or not. Accordingly, with the help of many assistants, he questioned 5705 persons, at 'random', and found that 21 of them had had such an experience and between them had seen 23 apparitions of living persons. Those figures, which were to be used as a yardstick, should be clearly distinguished from the data that follow below. Using those figures, together with the current death-rate and the fact that there are (usually) 365 days in a year, Gurney was enabled to estimate the probability of an apparition occurring within 12 hours before or after the appearer's death.

Now (and distinct from the sample poll above) Gurney found that his *Phantasms* collection contained 31 (not '32') cases of death coinciding with an apparition. He estimated that those cases came from a population of 300,000 persons, namely those, he believed, who had *read* the Literary Committee's appeal. With

those data and the probability of a death-coincidence given by the 'poll' (previous paragraph) he computed the odds against his 31 *Phantasms* cases being ascribable to chance coincidence at the stupendous figure of 'about a thousand billion trillion trillion trillions to 1', which in mathematical form can be written 10^{69} to 1. Recent computations using both the Binomial and Poisson Distributions give 10^{71} to 1. Perhaps Gurney cut out two of the zeros in the interest of moderation, and Gauld has my sympathy in cutting out (by implication) another fifteen of them! The figures are important only because they are open to dispute; and indeed within a year Gurney was obliged to make a retraction. We shall come to this presently.

Phantasms of the Living was given to the world on 30 October, 1886, and on the same day it was reviewed in a most gracious manner in a one-and-a-half column leading article in *The Times*. Some other reviews were also favourable. But there were two others that have attracted a good deal of attention in recent years. They were by A. Taylor Innes in the *Nineteenth Century* and by the American philosopher C. S. S. Peirce in the *Proceedings* of the first American S.P.R. Gauld remarks that Peirce was 'very much less courteous' than Innes. Maybe so, though I doubt whether Miss Caulfield would appreciate Innes's description of her experience—'mere trash'—as an act of courtesy.

Innes was a Scots lawyer who, it appears to me, set himself the task of preparing a brief for the prosecution, by searching for some general flaw, and having found it (as he supposed) hammering it home. The flaw, he pronounced, was the absence of surviving letters written by percipients before they heard of the distant agent's experience. Such letters, Innes asserted, would constitute 'absolute proof'. According to Innes there was 'not one' surviving letter in the whole book. Gurney replied that there were three such letters. Years later, however, one of them—the Cleave case—was discovered to have been a documentary hoax. After eighty years we know that letters are 'absolute proof' of nothing, whatever the innocent Innes may have thought.¹ Among his other errors, Innes discussed the inferior Supplement cases as if the authors had claimed them to be of the same evidential quality as those in the main section of the book. Little wonder that Gurney protested against Innes's 'misrepresentations and unfairness'.

Charles Santiago Sanders Peirce (he adopted the second name in

¹ Though letters are not *proof* of anything, they can of course be of some utility, provided the investigator treats them with severe caution. In some cases he will have to consider: forgery of handwriting; age of ink and paper; forged postmark; and other risks.

honour of his friend William James) was a more effective critic. Nevertheless, he perpetrated errors also, some of them very funny. But he made two good points: 1. That though only '300,000' people may have *read* Gurney's appeal for cases, many more may have *heard* of it; therefore the statistical odds (above) were in error. 2. Peirce pointed to a number of cases included in the 31 death coincidences which (whatever their status for paranormality) violated Gurney's own rules. As a result of this criticism Gurney withdrew 10 of the 31 cases. Though Gauld appears to have missed this item, it did not escape Mrs Sidgwick when she edited the abridged *Phantasms* in 1918.

Fortunately, it can be shown that even a drastic revision of Gurney's original data does not seriously impair his conclusions. If we (1) reduce the number of apparitions from 31 to 21; and (2) suppose (incredibly) that *every* person over the age of 15 in the United Kingdom did hear of the Literary Committee's appeal, we get the following statistical results:

Population	Apparitions	Odds
300,000	21	4×10^{43} to 1
24,000,000	21	10^6 to 1

If we *assume* the validity of Gurney's trial census from 5705 people, the above results, being highly significant, show that the 21 *Phantasms* apparitions occurring at the time of death cannot reasonably be attributed to chance coincidence.

The Founders also contains a valuable chapter on *Phantasms of the Dead* and a section on the famous (second) Census of Hallucinations. The author writes of this census with the respect it deserves but wisely points out that the methods of taking the census are 'antiquated' by modern standards. A few years ago Professor Broad (4) stressed the advisability of conducting a new census 'with all the refinements which recent experience in taking Gallup polls would suggest'. He indicated some of the precautions that would be necessary. The undertaking, it is apparent, would be a large one, but it would be of historic importance and if the Society is to push forward, and at the same time honour the memory of the Founders by learning lessons as they did, I am sure it ought to be done.

WILLIAM EGLINTON AND MALOBSERVATION

Gauld writes a beautifully concise account of the slate-writing mediumship of William Eglinton and its historic sequel, the Davey-Hodgson experiments. In 1886 Eglinton was the most famous

medium in the world, having practised his craft (in both senses of the word no doubt) on four continents. In dimly lit rooms, apparitions appeared from nowhere, solid phantoms moved about, Eglinton was levitated to the ceiling. One or two incidents in his career were highly suspicious, but by the early eighties he was concentrating on the daylight demonstration of slate-writing in which he proved to be the most dexterous performer in history.

Yet it was slate-writing that precipitated his downfall. Mrs Sidgwick attended a series of sittings at which nothing whatever happened. On the other hand, as Gauld recalls, 'Hodgson noted, as most witnesses did not, that Eglinton tried to distract his sitters, and that he carried out various manœuvres—such as dropping the slate or changing his hands on the plea of fatigue—which, though seemingly natural, might have served to disguise acts of *legerdemain*.' As Mrs Sidgwick realised, the impediment to accurate reporting of séances lay in the difficulty most people experienced in exercising *continuous* observation. And if no notes were taken during the progress of a séance (which was the usual custom) the accounts ultimately written were at the mercy of unreliable memories.

Mrs Sidgwick collected a large number of reports from Eglinton sitters and published them in a 52-page paper in the *Journal* of June 1886. Most of the accounts were favourable to Eglinton, or at worst non-committal. Mrs Sidgwick was unconvinced and made her conclusion clear in words that were often quoted thereafter: 'For myself I have now no hesitation in attributing the performances to clever conjuring.'

Mrs Sidgwick's paper roused some Spiritualists to indignant retorts and they were shocked when Hodgson pointed out numerous flaws in the séance reports. To counter the blow Eglinton, at his own expense, published in *Light* some 44 pages of testimonials. He invited his supporters among S.P.R. members to resign from the Society. But some eminent Spiritualists in the Society did not adopt Eglinton's proposal, and one of his most faithful friends, the Hon. Percy Wyndham, advised members *not* to resign. Gauld says: 'A considerable number . . . resigned from the Society.' Much could be said on this matter, but I need only mention that of 51 S.P.R. members who are known to have had sittings with Eglinton only six resigned: Stainton Moses, Dr Stanhope Speer, G. D. Haughton (Mrs Sidgwick's most ferocious antagonist), H. A. Kersey, Mrs E. Cannon and Mrs Brietzcke. One person who in another sense did retire was Eglinton—into private life.

One of Eglinton's clients was S. John Davey who at first was

profoundly impressed. Further psychical investigations had a chastening effect on Davey. To test his revised opinions he and Hodgson contributed a number of fake slate-writing séances at which the 'medium' was Davey.¹ The reports of the sitters form one of the most melancholy and illuminating chapters in the strange annals of psychical research. The sitters reported things that never happened, they failed to report crucial incidents, they misinterpreted what did happen, they forgot innumerable occurrences.

Gauld prints parallel passages of what a sitter thought happened and Hodgson's account of what really happened. They make grim reading. The sittings took place in excellent light, the slates and Davey's hands being no more than two or three feet from the sitters' eyes. Gauld asks, if the witnesses' testimony in those circumstances could be so unreliable, 'how much more unreliable may be their testimony about events taking place in the emotion-charged surroundings of a darkened séance room?' Even today the Davey-Hodgson reports are highly relevant to a long range of psychical investigations, from poltergeists to psychokinesis with dice.

THE AFFAIR OF MADAME BLAVATSKY

The most sensational report on physical phenomena ever published by the S.P.R. is that which is commonly but inaccurately known as the 'Hodgson Report' concerning the supposed marvels associated with the theosophy leader Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. Surprisingly (in my view) Gauld passes it by in barely six lines, remarking 'It has been strongly attacked by theosophists.' 'Strongly' is an ambiguous word: I should say 'weakly'.

In 1884 the S.P.R. Council appointed a committee of inquiry consisting of Gurney, Myers, Podmore, Professor and Mrs Sidgwick, Hodgson and Herbert Stack. Hodgson was sent to India to investigate the so-called Mahatma letters magically precipitated by the invisible adepts Koot Hoomi and Morya at Adyar and elsewhere. He also investigated other reported miracles. With Hodgson's account—and other evidence obtained independently of Hodgson—before them, the seven members of the Committee unanimously concluded: 'For our part, we regard her [Blavatsky] neither as the mouthpiece of hidden seers, nor as a mere vulgar adventuress; we think that she has achieved a title

¹ Part of those celebrated investigations took place at Hodgson's lodgings in Furnival's Inn, where the Prudential building now stands.

to permanent remembrance as one of the most accomplished, ingenious, and interesting impostors in history.'

Thereafter, over many years, defenders of Blavatsky and her imaginary Tibetan Mahatmas tended to take the line that if the so-called Hodgson report could be undermined, all would be well with Blavatsky's reputation. Nothing could be further from the truth.

She had confessed (20, pp. 225-35, 335) earlier delinquencies to A. N. Aksakof, begging him to protect her with silence. She had told her tall tale about the Obrenovich murder. She had initiated a fraudulent Mahatma letter on her fellow-theosophist C. C. Massey (12). There were other things damaging to her reputation, including the Kiddle imposture. Henry Kiddle's speech at an American Spritualist camp was printed in the *Banner of Light*. Some two months later Mme Blavatsky's friend A. P. Sinnett at Allahabad, where H.P.B. was his guest, received an 'astral' letter from Koot Hoomi. Sinnett printed the letter in his book *The Occult World*. Kiddle (9), reading the book, was 'very greatly surprised' to notice that substantial parts of K.H.'s letter had been pilfered without acknowledgement from his speech in the *Banner of Light*. Some years later, W. Emmette Coleman (20, pp. 353-66), a member of the Royal Asiatic and Pali Text Societies, going through Blavatsky's books discovered hundreds of passages that had been plagiarised from other writers.

Dr Theodore Besterman (3) though giving Blavatsky credit for certain qualities, including 'great shrewdness and even ability', felt constrained to say: 'Her writings are in the main muddled rubbish, in which, generally speaking, what is her own is worthless, and what is good, or even what is accurate, is stolen from others. For her possession of genuine supernormal powers there is not a shred of evidence worthy of the name; while for the fact that she systematically and constantly faked phenomena, the evidence is complete.'

EUSAPIA PALLADINO

Of the physical phenomena in general, the author covers a long period of history concisely and with scholarly care. He also provides a great number of useful source references. (The book as a whole contains, at a rough estimate upwards of 500 footnote references.) It may be mentioned that (p. 209) *Confessions of a Medium*, 1882, whose authorship is here properly denoted 'Anon.', was actually written by the medium William Chapman, and the chief character in the book, the medium 'Thomson', was the

celebrated Alfred Firman. The medium 'Mrs Clayer' (p. 86) was Mary Marshall the younger, niece of the more famous medium of that name. She married old Mrs Marshall's son, but sometimes used the name 'Mrs St Clair'—hence 'Clayer' no doubt, by which name she was known during her investigation by Mendeef's committee at St Petersburg in about 1875-6.

Eusapia Palladino gets an extremely important chapter to herself in which the author sheds new light on the unfortunate six weeks of séances at Cambridge in 1895. In view of the charges brought against Eusapia, the experiences of previous investigators deserve to be noted. In October 1892, following the Milan sittings, E. Torelli-Viollier accused Eusapia of the fraudulent use of her hands and feet to produce 'phenomena'. Later, at an S.P.R. meeting on 21 April 1893 Frank Podmore read a long review of Richet's report of the same séances, citing Richet's description of the usual position of the lady's hands and feet on and under the table, and leaving it to be clearly understood that unless the medium's limbs were controlled by competent researchers trouble was sure to follow. Moreover, Mrs Sidgwick (19) stated years later that she believed Palladino's trance was probably genuine, an opinion shared by Professor Morselli and other medical experts.

Why were the Cambridge sittings so disastrous that they injured the Society's reputation for fair dealing? Gauld makes some severe criticisms, with almost all of which I heartily agree. It appears to me also that the failure of the investigation is largely attributable to a conflict of class and character between the opposed parties. The Sidgwicks and their associates were members of the comfortable intellectual class living in the serene atmosphere of nineteenth-century Cambridge. Eusapia was a peasant born in tragedy (mother died at birth, father murdered) who had had to fight for existence. Removed from her mountain home to Naples, her mediumship began at puberty. She did not marry until she was 33. She seems to have had no children of her own, but according to Aksakof she 'adopted orphans'. After her first husband died in 1904 she married again, and this miserable union ended in divorce about 1911-12. Turning over photographs of Eusapia in her normal state it is hard to find any in which she looks happy. How different from pictures of Mrs Piper, or Mrs Leonard, or even the neurotic Mrs Holland.

The contrast between the Sidgwickians and the medium could not be more extreme. As for the Sidgwicks, they divided mediums into two categories—(1) Genuine, (2) Fraudulent. They despised fraudulent mediums. As for Eusapia, she divided investigators

into two categories—(1) Competent, (2) Incompetent. She despised incompetent investigators, and it was her misfortune at Cambridge to be placed at the disposal of such people. She was one of the two most famous mediums in the world and vain of her accomplishments (which many careful judges believe were probably in fair part genuine). What could she have thought when confronted with Frank and George Darwin, who so far as the record shows had no experience of psychical research? Or of Mr and Mrs H. M. Stanley, or the self-advertising and inept John Nevil Maskelyne who failed to discover the simplest trick in or out of trance, or Miss Alice Johnson who, so far as can be discovered, had never sat with a physical medium before? How different things were a dozen years later when Palladino was controlled and watched by three top-flight experts—Feilding, Baggally and Carrington. Then she respected, and the resultant report is a classic of psychical research.

For the Cambridge fiasco Gauld gives two further reasons to which I think considerable weight should be attached: 1. That the Sidgwicks' 'distaste for physical phenomena and their tenderness for the S.P.R.'s public image were leading causes of the unfortunate *Affaire Eusapia*.' 2. Though in 1898 Myers had two apparently convincing séances with Eusapia in Paris, the other Sidgwickians still refused to have any truck with her. Gauld remembering the *real* direction of the Sidgwicks' endeavours in psychical research, makes the shrewd comment, 'I very much doubt whether the Sidgwick group's otherworldly interests would have been furthered by [such] investigations.'

In the Cambridge sittings, as the author informs us, Eusapia produced her 'staple phenomena—table levitations, touches and grasps of the sitters, and movements of small articles or pieces of furniture', curtains bulged and a pseudo-limb protruded from the medium. Trickery, however, was suspected. Now, one of the most interesting things about the Cambridge sittings is that it was the only occasion on which the Cambridge group *failed* to learn lessons during the progress of the investigation. At a loss what to do they sent for Hodgson in Boston. Hodgson relaxed his control and, the author now reports, passed himself off as 'an amiable imbecile', his purpose being to find out how Eusapia tricked. (No attempt seems to have been made to discover the depth of her trance at this time.) The curious thing is that neither Hodgson nor anyone else discovered anything that had not been known to Continental investigators for years and published by them. What Hodgson did in releasing his control—with the concurrence of the Sidgwicks and Myers—was worse than a

blunder. For if the foundations of all science are *ethical*, then presumably the *first* duty of a psychical researcher is not to incite fraud but to prevent it, not to injure a woman's reputation but to protect it.

As for Eusapia's trances (which are the crux of the whole matter), they appear to have been of the hypnotic or somnambulant type, with amnesia supervening. She could not therefore know what Gauld would unearth from the S.P.R. archives fifty years after her death—the written testimony of the investigators themselves, showing that there were numerous incidents, some of them of a startling nature, inexplicable on any 'normal' hypothesis.

The investigation and the report constitute the Sidgwick group's greatest failure in twenty years. The report failed on two main grounds: (1) It was unfair to the auto-hypnotised medium; (2) It was unfair and misleading to the members of the S.P.R. who read the *Journal*. So far as I can estimate, it is the most unsatisfactory piece of reporting in the 40,000 pages of the Society's publications. But yet, surveying the scene of those two decades of ceaseless labours, the wonder is not that the leaders failed so badly on this occasion but that they did not fail far more often.

LEONORA PIPER AND ROSALIE THOMPSON

If the investigation of Eusapia Palladino was the group's most dismal failure, the investigation in the same decade of Mrs Leonora Piper was a triumph. In his chapter on 'The Mental Mediums' the author discusses the mediumships of Miss Kate Wingfield, Mrs Henrietta Everett, Mrs Piper and Mrs Rosalie Thompson (in the index her name is incorrectly printed 'Rosina'¹). The first two and the last were amateur mediums. Mrs Piper was a professional under permanent engagement to the S.P.R., receiving \$10 a sitting (about two guineas, worth somewhere between twelve and twenty guineas today). Gauld's account follows conventional lines, including the communications ostensibly from George Pellew and Lodge's Uncle Jerry. There is also a description of the strange death bed incident of Madame Elisa, which as the author says, may have been one of the pieces of evidence that pushed Hodgson from the telepathic to the survival hypothesis.

¹ For a book in which there are opportunities for thousands of errors, the number of actual mistakes is extremely small, so far as I have noticed. It may be mentioned, however, that Lord Rayleigh was not a Council member during the Society's 'few first years' (p. 138), not being co-opted until 1885; thereafter he remained a Council member for 34 years during which that body held about 350 meetings, but on no occasion did Lord Rayleigh trouble the Council with his presence.

There is one point related to the Piper business upon which, in fairness to an American, a word may be added. James Hyslop recorded every word that passed during his sittings, and it was his wish that all of it should be published in *Proceedings*. The Council demurred on the ground of expense—£514 for 650 pages. Gauld now reveals (p. 146) that Myers offered to defray the printing cost up to £250, and indeed 'after his death his widow implemented the promise to the tune of £92'. The point to be added is that Hyslop years later revealed that he himself paid 'more than \$1000 [£200] for printing' the report (8).

To turn from Mrs Piper to Mrs Thompson is to pass from comparative normality to a world hardly distinguishable from magic. Mrs Thompson, the young wife of a prosperous merchant, began her non-professional mediumship in 1894. Her chief investigator was an S.P.R. man F. W. Thurstan, a Cambridge graduate and Chancellor's Gold Medallist. Her phenomena included raps, slate writing, apports in profusion. Phantoms appeared from her cabinet, one Akbar speaking in Hindustani. At one sitting she was 'elongated' seven inches, at another she floated in the air 'in good light'.

In 1898 Myers visiting Mrs Thompson succeeded in diverting her mediumship from the physical to the mental side. Myers had 150 sittings. Believing that one of the communicators was his friend Annie Marshall he became convinced of her survival. It will shock many readers to learn from Gauld that the records of those séances have 'disappeared'.

Mrs Thompson's experiences with other S.P.R. sitters were mixed. Some were highly evidential, and certainly difficult to poke holes in. But one sitter, a young widow Mrs Barker (pseudonym) accompanied in the séance room by Hodgson and Myers, had a disconcerting experience. At one stage the control asked Mrs Barker and Hodgson to leave the room. But Mrs Barker left behind her on the table a partly opened bundle of letters and other relics. The medium awoke and had some conversation with Myers. Then Myers left the room to fetch the sitter—leaving the letters unguarded for several minutes. At the resumed sitting virtually all the 'evidence' provided by the medium could have been obtained by her from a quick look at the letters during Myers's absence (or perhaps in part when she was allowed to touch the letters later in the séance). After six sittings, Hodgson wrote a report accusing Mrs Thompson of fraud. The evidence was circumstantial only, and Hodgson's denunciations were directed at the wrong quarter. The real offender was Myers. For this was another instance of a researcher failing in his most important duty

—to protect the good name of the medium. When Myers left Mrs Thompson alone with the letters he made it possible for her—perhaps on momentary impulse—to glimpse their contents.

Gauld cites Podmore to the effect that if a sensitive cheats in a state of dissociation it should not be regarded as a mark of moral culpability. True of course, but if I understand the Thompson report, when Myers left the room Mrs Thompson was awake and not in a dissociated state.

It is a happy thing for the lady's reputation that the sittings with Dr van Eeden (anonymously introduced from Holland) and some other S.P.R. members were of an evidential quality far transcending her sittings with Mrs Barker. Gauld quotes striking evidence from the van Eeden séances. Incidentally, he also prints hitherto unpublished material from a Myers sitting with Madame Rohart in Paris in 1877 at which Annie Marshall purportedly communicated.

THE THEORIES OF MYERS

Two chapters devoted to Myers's theories of the subliminal self and of the soul are, in relation to contemporary thinking—or non-thinking—the most important in the book. It would be futile to try to summarize them in a review, but in my opinion those chapters form an essential companion to the study of the theoretical parts of Myers's *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*. Gauld shows that Myers's 'famous theory of the subliminal self' is in its details and applications 'difficult to follow', but he fairly points out that this may be due in part to the fact that Myers was still working on the theory at the time of his death. Among 'other obvious sources of difficulty' Gauld notes that, 'as one would perhaps expect, Myers' eyes continually wander from the path at his feet towards the distant and numinous heights which lie before him.' This may indeed create difficulty for our understanding of Myers, but it is not, I suggest, a defect. Great acts of creation are less likely to emerge from rational cogitation, but rather as sudden inspirations that seem at first to have no rational basis whatever. In the history of psychical research no man has been so richly endowed with original ideas as Frederic Myers. He invented the term 'subliminal uprush', and it does not need much reading between the lines to realise that he was a constant recipient of it. In his book, his ideas—often undeveloped—are strewn through the 1300 pages so prodigally that if their author had lived a hundred years he could not have worked them all to fruition. Frederic Myers was the Coleridge of psychical research.

From Myers we pass to a final chapter, 'The Turn of the Century', in which we read of the last years and deaths of Sidgwick, Myers and Hodgson. Here, too, there is more information about Myers that will be new to most S.P.R. readers.

Earlier, Gauld expressed the view (which would be hard to dispute) that the death of Edmund Gurney at the age of 41 was 'perhaps the greatest single blow that psychical research has ever suffered'. Now, at the end of this last chapter the author suggests that if Gurney had lived, a book written by him rather than by Myers would have made 'the public image of psychical research . . . more acceptable to psychologists'. Though sharing Gauld's admiration for Gurney's superior gifts as investigator and writer I find it hard to imagine that a volume by Gurney—or even one from the President of the Immortals Himself—would have produced any noticeable effect on the minds of psychologists. For it is surely apparent, in this irrational world, that people do not believe a thing when the facts prove it, but only when it is *convenient* to believe it. 'One of the greatest pains to human nature,' said Bagehot, 'is the pain of a new idea.' And this seems to be true of all ranks of society and all levels of education.

THE END OF AN ERA

Sidgwick died in 1900, Myers in 1901, and with the death of Hodgson in 1905 all but one of the original Sidgwick group had gone. Mrs Sidgwick became the effective leader of the S.P.R. for the next third of a century; and she, her brother Gerald and J. G. Piddington became the ruling power in the Society. But, as Gauld says, 'whether for the S.P.R. it was altogether good to be dominated by a group of elderly and closely linked persons whose immediate interests were in communications from their own deceased intimate friends might be doubted.' Then they too died or passed into retirement. They were succeeded, to all intents, by several of their younger friends of whom Mr and Mrs Salter were the most notable. With the death of Mr Salter on 21 July, 1969, we who remain find ourselves at the end of an era. Something of the Sidgwick tradition may survive but the Sidgwick influence is no more.

The time may therefore have arrived for examining the contemporary situation in psychical research and for envisaging the Society's future. The great value of Gauld's book lies in this, that it is both an inspiring story and a cautionary tale. For we are shown not only the personal qualities and triumphs of the Founders but also their occasional weaknesses and failures. The author

writes as a pure historian and only rarely seeks to draw lessons for our benefit. Even so, we shall do well to remember the words of a former President, Professor Dodds (5) in a slightly different context: 'As a man cannot escape from his own shadow, so no generation can pass judgement on the problems of history without reference, conscious or unconscious, to its own problems.'

In this book we find material and historical trends that cannot fail to cause us to reflect on our 'own problems'. For *The Founders of Psychical Research* is in a class by itself, having no equal in its special field. As a guide it is fairminded and as free from bias as (humanly speaking) it is possible to be. It is evocative, and in the pleasantest way, provocative (as the indulgent reader of this review may have observed). Whether the author intended it or not, it abounds in lessons for the present day for those who care to read with understanding and can at the same time employ the experience of the past as tools to forge the future. In recent years a great deal of psychical research has been carried out—and in the United States one stands amazed at the outpouring of papers by keen and hard-working experimenters. But whether all this in both countries and other lands shows *real* progress in a sense that would be acceptable to Gurney, Hodgson, Myers and Nora Sidgwick is a rather different question. What measures the ingenious Founders would have applied to speed the progress of psychical research now would be a profitable subject for speculation.

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NOTE ON THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE S.P.R.

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MR FRASER NICOL, in the foregoing paper takes exception to the statement that the S.P.R. was founded by a group of scholars and scientists, words which are used in the leaflet issued by the Society for the information of applicants for membership. He observes that the first Council of the Society included a majority of spiritualists. The words quoted appear in a slightly different form in two places in the late W. H. Salter's book *ZOAR* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1961), p. 14, 'This (i.e. the case for a careful, impartial examination of the evidence) led to the foundation in 1882 of the Society for Psychical Research (S.P.R.) by a group which included many leading scientists, philosophers and scholars', and p. 233, 'The Society (i.e. the S.P.R.) was founded in 1882 round a nucleus of friends whom Henry Sidgwick, the first President, and Frederick Myers began to collect in 1874.'

The 'nucleus of friends' referred to in the last quotation was presumably the 'small group of Cambridge friends' mentioned by F. W. H. Myers on p. 7 of Vol. I of *Human Personality*, in the following passage—'In about 1873—at the crest, as one may say, of perhaps the highest wave of materialism which has ever swept over these shores—it became the conviction of a small group of Cambridge friends that the deep questions thus at issue must be fought out in a way more thorough than the champions either of religion or of materialism had yet suggested,' and continued that in his view (as held at the time) knowledge must be discovered 'simply by experiment and observation.' It will thus be seen that by 1874, some 7 or 8 years before 1881, when Prof. Wm. Barrett visited E. D. Rogers at Finchley, there was a group (not organized in a Society) centred on Cambridge, which was interesting itself in the scientific investigation of psychical phenomena. It is likely that by 1881 this group had considered forming a properly constituted Society, in which case the question must have arisen as to the part to be played in it by spiritualists. Without their goodwill it would have been difficult and perhaps impossible to carry out investigation of the phenomena of mediumship, and the visit of Barrett to Rogers was presumably to discuss the possibilities of co-operation. Rogers by agreeing to co-operate and to procure the use of the rooms of the British National Association of Spiritualists for the following conference,

no doubt gave a valuable impulse to the foundation of the Society, but, in the light of what had been going on since 1873, he can hardly be called the Founder of the Society. As to the part played by Barrett in the founding of the Society, he took the Chair at the preliminary Conference on 5th January, 1882, at which Dawson Rogers was present, and the founding of the Society was clearly a co-operative effort. The truth is no doubt accurately summed up in a footnote of p. 8 on *Human Personality*. 'The Society for Psychical Research was founded in 1882, Professor W. F. Barrett taking a leading part in its promotion.'